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Review of Dr. Beecher's Sermon at  
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**REVIEW**

OF

**DR. BEECHER'S SERMON**

AT

**WORCESTER.**

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First Published in the Christian Examiner.

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**Boston :**

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## REVIEW, &c.

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*The Faith once delivered to the Saints. A Sermon delivered at Worcester, Mass. Oct. 15, 1823, at the Ordination of the Rev. Loammi Ives Hoadly, to the Pastoral Office over the Calvinistic Church and Society in that place. By*  
LYMAN BEECHER, D. D.

ACCORDING to Dr. Beecher,

‘The faith once delivered to the saints included, it is believed, among other doctrines, the following :—

‘That men are free agents ; in the possession of such faculties, and placed in such circumstances, as render it practicable for them to do whatever God requires ; reasonable that he should require it ; and fit that he should inflict, literally, the entire penalty of disobedience ;—such ability is here intended, as lays a perfect foundation for government by law, and for rewards and punishments according to deeds.

‘That the law of God requires love to God with all the heart, and impartial love for men ; together with certain overt duties to God and men, by which this love is to be expressed ; and that this law is supported by the sanctions of eternal life and eternal death.

‘That the ancestors of our race violated this law ; that, in some way, as a consequence of their apostacy, all men, as soon as they become capable of accountable action, do, *of their own accord, most freely, and most wickedly*, withhold from God the *supreme love* and from man the *impartial love* which the law requires, besides violating many of its practical precepts : and that the obedience of the heart, which the law requires, has *ceased* entirely from the whole race of man.

‘That, according to the principles of moral government, obedience, either antecedent to transgression or subsequent, cannot avert



the penalty of law ; and that pardon, upon condition of repentance merely, would destroy the efficacy of moral government.

‘ That an atonement has been made for sin by Jesus Christ ; with reference to which God can maintain the influence of his law and forgive sin, upon condition of repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ :—that all men are invited sincerely in this way to return to God, with an assurance of pardon and eternal life if they comply

‘ That a compliance with these conditions is practicable, in the regular exercise of the powers and faculties given to man as an accountable creature ; and is prevented only by the exercise of a voluntary, criminal aversion to God, so inflexibly obstinate, that by motives merely men are never persuaded to repent and believe.

‘ That God is able, by his Spirit, to make to the mind of man such an exhibition of the truth, as shall unfailingly convince him of sin, render him willing to obey the gospel, and actually and joyfully obedient.

‘ That this special influence of the Holy Spirit is given according to the supreme discretion or good pleasure of God ; and yet, ordinarily, is so inseparably associated with the use of means by the sinner, as to create ample encouragement to attend upon them, and to render all hopes of conversion while neglecting or rejecting the truth, or while living in open sin, eminently presumptuous.

‘ That believers are justified by the merits of Christ through faith ; and are received into a covenant with God, which secures their continuance in holiness forever ; while those, who die in their sins, will continue to sin wilfully, and to be punished justly for ever.

‘ That God exercises a providential government, which extends to all events in such a manner, as to lay a just foundation for resignation to him in afflictions brought upon us by the wickedness of men, and for gratitude in the reception of good in all the various modes of human instrumentality ; that all events shall illustrate his glory and be made subservient to the good of his kingdom ; and that this government is administered, in accordance with a purpose or plan, known and approved of by him from the beginning.

‘ Finally, that the God of the universe has revealed himself to us as existing in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost ; possessing distinct and equal attributes, and in some unrevealed manner so united as to constitute *one God*.’ pp. 3—5.

What makes this statement of Christian doctrine remarkable, considered as coming from a reputed Calvinist, is its decidedly *anti*-calvinistic bearing ; expressly denying some of the peculiarities of calvinism, distinctly asserting none of them, nor even implying any one of them in such a manner, as to

make it obvious to a common reader. It begins with asserting, in as strong and unqualified language as was ever used by an Arminian or Unitarian, the doctrine of man's actual *ability* and *free agency*: 'That men [i. e. *men* as they now are, not *man* as he was originally created] are free agents; in the possession of such faculties, and placed in such circumstances, as render it practicable for them to do whatever God requires.' Dr. Beecher must know the natural and obvious sense of these words, and to suspect him, therefore, of using them in any other, would be to suspect him of a dishonest artifice. On the subject of *original sin*, and *native depravity*, our author is hardly less unsound in his orthodoxy. He does, indeed, say, that the '*supreme love*' to God and the '*impartial love*' to man, which the law requires, have 'ceased entirely' from the earth. By this, however, he cannot mean, that all *real* 'obedience of the heart,' of every kind and degree, 'has ceased entirely from the whole race of man;' because he must believe that *some degree*, at least, of this obedience, is still to be found in real Christians. All, therefore, that he can intend, and all that his language necessarily signifies, is this, that, in our fallen state, our love to God has ceased to be absolutely *supreme*, and our love to man strictly *impartial*; that is, that our obedience is *imperfect*;—not, we should think, a very bold position, nor one likely to be contested, by any man in his right mind.—The statement here given of the doctrine of *atonement*, might also be adopted by all Unitarians of whom we have any knowledge.\* Even upon the difficult and much disputed question respecting the first motion in the conversion of an individual, Dr. Beecher advances the opinion, directly in the face of calvinism, that the conversion is 'inseparably associated with the *use of means by the sinner*.' Indeed, upon this abstruse point, and forming by far the most offensive feature of calvinism, as it is *now* taught, he seems, so far as we can understand him, to accord entirely with Whitby, the great oracle of pure Arminianism. 'It therefore can be only requisite, in order to these ends,' says Whitby, 'that the *GOOD SPIRIT* should *so illuminate* our understandings, that we, attending to and considering what lies before us, should apprehend, and be *convinced* of our duty.' And he further adds: 'Now to

\* See on this subject *Sparks' Inquiry*, P. III. l. 4.

consider in order to approbation and conviction, to choose in order to our good, and to refuse that we may avoid misery, must be the actions not of God but man, though the light that doth convince, and the motives which engage him thus to choose and refuse, are certainly from God.\*

Enough has been said to show, that, according to Dr. Beecher, 'the truth once delivered to the saints' is decidedly *anti-calvinistic*. This concession, considering the quarter from which it comes, is certainly an important one, and we thank him for it. He goes on to say, (p. 5,) 'To prevent circumlocution I shall, in this discourse, call them [the doctrines as before given] *the Evangelical System*, and for the same reason, I shall call the opposite *the Liberal System*.'

We have not the least inclination to dispute about words, or names. Dr. Beecher has an undoubted right to express

\* *Six Discourses*. Am. Ed. p. 169.—We must refer our readers to Professor Norton's *Views of Calvinism*, for quotations from the standard calvinistic works to prove, how entirely Dr. Beecher has erred and strayed from that system. We cannot, however, refrain from showing, by a few extracts of our own, how completely the doctor is at issue with his calvinistic brethren on the last mentioned point; to wit, 'the use of means by the sinner.' Our first citation shall be from Calvin himself, *Comment. in Apost. Epist. ad Rom. IX. 16*. 'He collects from that testimony this incontrovertible consequence, that our election is to be attributed neither to our industry, nor effort, nor endeavour; but that the whole is to be referred to the counsel of God; lest any one should think that those who are chosen are therefore chosen because they have so deserved, or have by any means gained to themselves the favour of God; or lastly, that there is any atom of worthiness by which God may be moved. But understand simply, that it does not depend upon our will, or upon our endeavour, (for he has put 'running' for effort, or contention,) that we should be reckoned among the elect; but that the whole of this is of divine goodness, which, of its own accord, takes those who neither will, nor endeavour, nor even think of it. \*\*\* Let us therefore determine, that the salvation of those, whom it pleases God to save, is so ascribed to the mercy of God, that NOTHING remains for the industry of man.' We might cite passages to the same effect without end; but one more, taken from Edwards, will be sufficient. 'Hence it may be inferred,' says he, 'that nothing in the reason and nature of things appears, from the consideration of any moral weight of that former kind of sincerity which has been spoken of, at all obliging us to believe, or leading us to suppose, that God has made any positive promises of salvation, or grace, or any saving assistance, or any spiritual benefit whatsoever, to any desires, prayers, endeavours, striving, or obedience of those, who hitherto have no true virtue, or holiness in their hearts; though we should suppose all the sincerity, and the utmost degree of endeavour, that is possible to be in a person without holiness.' *Freedom of the Will*, P. III. s. v. *Works*, Vol. V. p. 202. We may be permitted to subjoin the testimony of Dr. Woods to the same point. 'That act of divine grace which, so far as the conduct of sinners is concerned, is wholly unconditional, is, as I understand it, the first formation of a holy character, or the commencement of real goodness in the heart.' *Reply to Dr. Ware*, p. 158:

'his own opinions in his own way; and to call the system embodying them by his own name, or any other *not already appropriated*. But he has no right to use a term, the obvious tendency of which must be to deceive and mystify the public, leaving them to suppose that his system contains no innovation upon the popular faith. Still less has he a right, after having avowed the doctrines laid down in this discourse, to boast of them as being strictly, or even substantially, the same with those held by the great body of the reputed orthodox throughout our country, or to assert or intimate, as he repeatedly does, that they were the doctrines held by the Reformers, the Puritans, and the Fathers of New England; for he must know that this is not true, or his ignorance upon the subject is such as to make it a sin for him to write upon it in so confident a manner. This radical mistake, however, if we may call it a mistake, runs through his whole sermon, affecting all its reasonings and conclusions.

What then shall we say of Dr. Beecher's calling the '*opposite*' to his doctrines, as given above, '*the Liberal System?*' That he means by the '*liberal system*,' in this place, what is commonly understood by Unitarianism in this country, is evident, because he afterwards refers to Professor Ware and Dr. Channing as among its most distinguished advocates. But where does he find Professor Ware, or Dr. Channing advocating a system made up of doctrines the *opposite* to those, which he has here advanced? That we may not be suspected of quibbling about a word, we shall show, by another passage, that Dr. Beecher really meant all that we charge him with meaning. 'For the question is not,' says he, (p. 40.) '*how much of this system* [these words are italicised by Dr. B. himself,] may be misunderstood, consistently with sanctification by that which is still embraced; but can it be rejected *entirely*, by those who possess a Bible, and they who do it be sanctified without it, and saved by the instrumentality of error? Again, therefore, we demand it of him to prove, that Professor Ware, and Dr. Channing do indeed maintain a system made up of doctrines the *opposite* to those, which he himself has here advanced. Let him refer to the passages in which they have asserted, or implied, that men are not free agents; or that an atonement has not been made for sin by Jesus Christ; or that a compliance with the

conditions of the gospel is NOT 'practicable in the regular exercise of the powers and faculties given to man, as an accountable creature;' or that God does NOT exercise 'a providential government, which extends to all events.' Let him do this, or retract his charge as publickly as it has been made, or consent to lie under the imputation of a shameless calumny. Here then is another radical error with which Dr. Beecher starts, and it cleaves to him to the end.

The main body of this sermon is occupied in attempting to prove, by a series of collateral arguments, independently of the direct evidence of scripture, that the orthodox (understanding this word in its largest signification amongst us) are right, and that the liberal party (understood also in its largest sense) are wrong. Or, as Dr. Beecher himself expresses it, (p. 6,) 'For the sake of argument, we shall suppose the evidence from exposition to be on each side exactly balanced, and proceed to lay into the scale of evangelical exposition those arguments, which seem to furnish evidence of its correctness.' These arguments are five in number, but naturally resolve themselves into these three :

- I. The *obvious* meaning of scripture ;
- II. The testimony of the primitive church ; and
- III. Its superiour moral efficacy, or sanctifying influence.

On each of which topicks we shall say a few words in reply to what Dr. Beecher has advanced. With regard to the **OBVIOUS MEANING OF SCRIPTURE**, there are several principles to be observed, which Dr. Beecher has not considered, or has chosen to keep out of sight. In the first place, it is evident, that the *obvious* sense is no further to be followed by us, than we have reason to believe it to be the *true* sense of the passage in question. That it is not always the true sense, nay, that it frequently is not the true sense, is certain ; since all figurative language, with which the scriptures abound, consists essentially in a departure from the literal or obvious meaning of the words used. Besides, when we speak of the obvious sense being probably the true sense of any passage, we mean the obvious sense as it struck the mind of the writer, and not as it may happen to strike our minds. Such have been the changes that have taken place in the customs and manners of the world, in the modes of thinking and speaking that have prevailed, in the controversies that have

been carried on in the church, and especially in the peculiar, and, as it were, *technical* meaning of some of the leading terms used in those controversies, that, even in those passages where the sacred writers intended to be understood in the obvious import of the language used, what was the obvious import *to them*, may appear a forced and most unnatural construction *to us*, from the necessary changes which language has undergone. This holds true especially of those who are under the necessity of reading the Bible in a translation, and, as in the case of our translation, in a language remarkably different from the original, in many of its characteristics. That the sacred writers were, for the most part, unlettered men, (a circumstance alluded to by Dr. Beecher,) only serves to heighten this difficulty, as they must have been so much the more likely to use language in its *local* and *peculiar* sense, rather than in its general, precise, and philosophical sense. Add to this, the effect which a man's theological prejudices and prepossessions must have upon his mind, in judging of the obvious import of many passages of scripture. If he has been trained to associate inseparably a peculiar theological sense to certain words of frequent recurrence in the sacred writings, (such for example as *grace*, *election*, *justification*, &c.) it will follow of course that many of the passages, in which these words are found, will suggest to him a meaning, and it will seem to him their *obvious* meaning, though widely different from their true meaning, and, indeed, from their obvious meaning to all unprejudiced readers.

These remarks, which might be extended to a much greater length, will serve as a general reply to what Dr. Beecher has advanced, or insinuated, under this head. Suppose it conceded, that there are a few single passages of scripture, the literal or obvious import of which seems opposed to Unitarianism; it is no more than may be said of every other system. How many texts are urged against the orthodox system, the obvious sense of which must be restrained, turned aside, or entirely sunk; or the system itself be abandoned. Professor Stuart, after attempting to reconcile some of these with orthodoxy, in his *Letters to Dr. Channing*, admits it to be a subject open to discussion, 'whether I have violated the laws of exegesis in doing this; and whether you, or I, depart

most from them, in explaining the texts which seem at variance with the opinions that we defend.\* We have no doubt but that Mr. Stuart has discovered as much learning and address in sinking the obvious meaning of these passages, and bringing up another, as any Trinitarian ever did, or ever can; but let any one consider, how poorly he has succeeded, and he will be more and more convinced of the truth of the following remark of Dr. Carpenter: 'My full conviction is, that no "twisting" and "straining" on the part of the Unitarian, to show the consistency of the Trinitarian's scriptural evidence with his own belief, can possibly equal that to which the Trinitarian is reduced, when he attempts to prove that the Son is *omniscient*, though he himself declared that he did not know the time when his own prophecies should be accomplished; (Mark xiii, 32;) that the Son is *omnipotent*, though he declared that *of himself he could do nothing*; (John v, 30;) and that the Son is "*the true God*," though our Lord in *prayer* to his *God and Father*, addressed HIM as the "*ONLY TRUE GOD*;" and this *exclusively of himself*, for he immediately speaks of himself as the person SENT by the *only true God*.' (John xvii, 1, 3, 8.)†

But Dr. Beecher may still contend for the obvious sense of the '*proof texts*' adduced by the orthodox in support of their system; and that the obvious sense of the proof texts of every other system, and, indeed, of all the rest of scripture, should be sacrificed to it. Dr. Beecher seems to lay great stress on this argument; but why, we cannot divine. Wherefore is this uncommon deference and respect to be paid to the obvious sense of the proof texts of the *orthodox*? There is not a denomination of Christians under heaven without their proof texts; the Catholics have them, the Baptists have them, the Quakers have them, the Antinomians have them, the Universalists have them; and, in each case, the obvious sense of these proof texts, if you take them separate from their connexion, may seem to favour the doctrines, which they are brought forward to support. To say, therefore, that the orthodox can gather together a few such texts, is no more than might be said of the most misguided man living. Besides, when Dr. Beecher intimates it as conceded

\* Letter IV.

† Reply to Bishop Magee. Preface, p. xxxvii.

'by Unitarian commentators and writers,' that the only plain and obvious sense of these proof texts, taken by themselves, favours orthodoxy, he is to be understood as speaking with his usual accuracy. If he will take the trouble to turn to a Review of Professor Stuart's Letters, in the *Christian Disciple*, he will find it there maintained at length, 'that, putting every other part of scripture out of view, and forgetting all that it teaches us, this proposition [the doctrine of the Trinity] is clearly proved to be FALSE by the very passages which are brought in its support.'\*

Too much, a great deal too much, has been conceded to the orthodox in regard to the plain and obvious meaning of scripture. Their writers and preachers omit no opportunity to assert, or insinuate, that Unitarians are forever departing from it, but that they *never* do; and this impression, false as it is, they find less difficulty in making upon the public mind, as the bulk of the community, having been accustomed from their earliest years to read the Bible under strong orthodox biases, are ever inclined to think the orthodox exposition the obvious one, merely because it is the common one, and the one to which they have been long used; and the Unitarian exposition strained and far-fetched, merely because it is new to them. Let the subject be fairly considered, and there is no sect in christendom so little liable to the charge of slighting the plain and obvious teachings of the word of God, as the Unitarian. What sect has been so constant in asserting the great Protestant doctrine of the sufficiency of the scriptures; and that scripture should be interpreted by scripture, and not by human creeds and glosses? What sect has protested so loudly against all mysticism, whether of thought or feeling; and against all scholastic refinements, and metaphysical distinctions, above the comprehension of common readers? What sect has stood so much upon that sound principle of interpretation, that the obscure and difficult parts of scripture are to be explained by those that are plain, and easy to be understood? What sect has insisted so much upon *the simplicity that is in Christ*, or complained so much of the manner in which men have been corrupted from it by false philosophy and the policy of states? In fine, what sect has

\* Vol. I. p. 384. *et seq.*



been so ready to put the Bible into the hands of the common people, without a single word of comment, and even in a translation given by the adverse party ; or so willing to test the merits of the controversy by the opinions, which any man of plain common sense would draw from it, provided he could come to its perusal free from all theological prepossessions? And yet this is the sect, which, according to Dr. Beecher, makes the true meaning of scripture to be 'one which can be seen only by men of classical and philosophical vision,' leaving the common people *without any Bible*.

Instead of attempting to fasten this preposterous charge upon the Unitarians, a charge refuted by every feature of their system, and every event in their history, let him turn and defend his own system, and his own party, if he can, from a like imputation. The orthodox friendly to the plain and obvious import of scripture! How then are we to account for the fact that their 'proof texts,' for which Dr. Beecher expresses so undue a solicitude, are drawn with scarcely a single exception from the writings of John and Paul?—unquestionably, and upon every principle, the most peculiar, the most obscure, and the most difficult to be reconciled with themselves and the rest of scripture, of all the writers in the New Testament ; so much so, that an apostle informs us, (2 Peter iii. 16.) with respect to one of them, that some things in his epistles had begun to be wrested, even in his day, by the ignorant and unstable. How, too, are we to reconcile, with a proper regard for the plain and obvious teachings of revelation, the frequent instances, in which they make the express declarations of the gospel bend to opinions founded on mere inference or implication? Our Saviour says, in plain and direct terms, 'When thou prayest, pray to thy FATHER;' (Matth. vi. 6.) 'When ye pray, say, Our FATHER'; (Luke xii. 2.) 'And in that day ye shall ask ME nothing.' (John xvi. 23.) The Trinitarian, however, because it seems to be implied in a doctrine, which he thinks may be inferred from scripture, does not hesitate, in the face of these express declarations, to introduce two other objects of invocation besides the Father, and to make Jesus Christ himself one of them. Does this seem like adhering to the plain and express directions of scripture? Again ; how can Trinitarians and Calvinists pretend to pay even a decent respect to the plain and

obvious meaning of the sacred writings, while they continue to make so much use of the hypothesis of two natures in Christ; an hypothesis wholly and entirely conjectural, not having a syllable of direct support from scripture; an hypothesis, however, which puts an entirely new construction on several of the plainest passages of revelation, and without which the doctrine of the Trinity could not stand for an instant? It is said, (Mark xiii. 32.) 'Of that day and that hour knoweth no man; no, not the angels, which are in heaven, *neither the Son, but the Father.*' Nobody in his senses will deny, that the only natural and proper construction of these words would lead us to suppose, that the Son of God knew not 'of that day and that hour;' but, if he did not, the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be defended; and to attempt, in this case, to screen it by pretending that though he did not know it in his human nature, he did in his divine, seems to us a more bold and palpable wresting of the plain and obvious import of scripture, than can be paralleled in the whole history of Unitarianism.

Nor is it with a few single passages only that the orthodox use this unwarrantable freedom; but the plain and obvious import of the whole tenour of the gospel is turned aside in accommodation to their system. All those passages, which speak of our Saviour as being *sent* by a superiour Being; ('As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world'; John xvii. 18.) all those passages which represent his wisdom, power, and authority as being *derived* from the Father; ('The words that I speak unto you, I speak not *OF MYSELF*; but the Father, that dwelleth in me, *HE* doeth the works,' John xiv. 10.) all those passages which declare his *inferiority* and *dependence*; ('For my Father is greater than I,' Ib. 28. 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Matth. xxvii. 46.) all these passages, and a multitude of examples might be collected under each class, though we have room to give but one; and also the whole history of our Lord; his birth; his gradually increasing in knowledge and wisdom, and in favour with God and man; his intercourse with the disciples, and with the world; his hopes, and fears, and regrets; his prayers, misgivings, agony, and death; the manner in which he was treated by his disciples while upon earth, and the manner in which they spake

of him after his crucifixion ;—in short, the whole gospel narrative, from beginning to end, must be violently wrested from its only plain and obvious import, or we cannot believe that Jesus Christ was GOD ALMIGHTY. Moreover, all those passages which expressly affirm, that ‘the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son ;’ (Ezek. xviii. 20.) all those passages which assure us, that ‘every one that asketh, receiveth ; and he that seeketh, findeth ; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened ;’ (Matth. vii. 8.) all those passages which intimate, that we may taste ‘of the heavenly gift,’ and be ‘made partakers of the Holy Ghost,’ and yet fall away ;’ (Heb. vi. 4, 6.) all those passages which assert that God hath ‘no pleasure in the death of the wicked ; but that the wicked turn from his way and live ;’ (Ezek. xxxii. 11.) also, all the promises and threatenings of the gospel, its warnings, exhortations, and remonstrances,—nothing but a cruel mockery of man’s impotence unless it depends on himself whether they shall have their effect ; nay, the whole constitution and complexion of the moral parts of the Bible can convey no other meaning to a plain unlettered man, than one irreconcilably opposed to the fundamental principles of Calvinism.

Under such circumstances it certainly seems to us to discover not a little effrontery in our opponents to think of sustaining against us the charge of disregarding, or contemning, the plain and obvious meaning of the sacred writings. Indeed, if we were called upon to give a comparative view of Unitarianism and Calvinism, there are no points on which we should insist more, in showing the decided superiority of the former, than on its strict adherence to the plain meaning of the plain parts of scripture, and on the ease with which the whole system can be understood, and comprehended by men of all capacities. We do not deny, that there are a few passages of scripture, which give us some difficulty ; but, for the most part, they are such as would be perplexing upon any principle, and scarcely admit of any consistent explanation ; and, besides, even of these difficulties there are fewer incumbering our system, than any other ; and not more than might reasonably be expected considering the nature and history of the volume to be explained and reconciled. With respect to these difficult texts our rule is this : To endeavour to recon-

cile them, if it can be done by fair interpretation, with the obvious meaning of the plainer passages upon the same or the kindred subjects, with the tenour of the gospel, and the leading objects of the dispensation; and this the researches of scholars have enabled us to do, in most cases, in a manner perfectly satisfactory. For example, the text, (John x. 30,) 'I and my Father are one,' has often been urged against us as a difficulty; but the difficulty disappears upon turning to another passage of the same writer, (xvii. 20—22.) where we learn that the unity here intended is merely a unity of purpose and cooperation; 'Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that *they* may be *ONE, even as we are ONE.*' And even if there were a few difficult texts, which we could not construe in conformity with the obvious sense of the rest of scripture, we should consider it as evincing much greater wisdom, and much greater reverence for the word of God, to conclude that we had not yet succeeded in ascertaining their true import, rather than to fix upon them a meaning, at best but doubtful, and then proceed to bend all revelation to it.

We doubt not, that Dr. Beecher is fully persuaded in his own mind, that the true import of scripture favours his system; but not more so than we are, that it favours ours. We hope, however, never to express our confidence in the same indecent and irreverent manner. He says, that if the obvious meaning of his proof texts be not the true one, 'then the common people have *no Bible*,' and 'the character of God is also implicated, as having practised on his subjects a most deplorable deception.' (p. 7.) But how does Dr. Beecher know, that the obvious meaning of these texts is the true one? How does he know, that he himself may not ere long be convinced, that they should bear a different construction? How then does he dare, upon the strength of his fallible judgment, to implicate the character of God, as having practised upon his subjects a deplorable deception? Such language is but too common among theological disputants of all denominations; but it always reminds us of the rebuke given by Dr. Priestley to a Mr. Venn, with whom he had a controversy, and who had reasoned in much the same manner with Dr. Beecher;—saying, that if Unitarianism were true the Bible would be 'a heap of impious nonsense,' and he 'would burn it.' 'By the

way,' says Dr. Priestley in his reply, 'I would advise you, sir, not to be so ready, upon every occasion, to *burn your Bible*. You have a great deal to learn from it yet. For my own part, notwithstanding that you suppose I hold it very cheap, I could, with pleasure, spend the remainder of my life in the study of it, as the only rule of faith and manners.'

We now come to the second topic proposed ; namely, **THE TESTIMONY OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH**. All who are acquainted with this subject know it to be embarrassed by difficulties, which make it unwise to place much dependence on arguments derived thence. There is so much uncertainty respecting the authenticity, or genuineness, of many of the writings attributed to the early Fathers, so little of clearness or consistency in the views which they give of religion, so little of concert in what they teach, and in some of them so much fanciful and absurd dreaming, that we cannot too highly appreciate that great principle of Protestantism, which throws them out of consideration in fixing the sense of scripture, and ascertaining the Christian doctrines. We doubt whether any disputed point was ever satisfactorily settled by an appeal to antiquity. There is much good sense in the following remarks quoted by Bishop Law, in his invaluable work on the *Theory of Religion*.\* 'It is with religion as it is with arts and sciences, the first essays are seldom perfect ; they arrive not at their height at first, they require a gradual improvement. And so it is here ; the primitive Christians were not grown up to that perfection of knowledge and understanding, which was designed by the Author of our religion. Christianity was in its infancy, at most in its childhood, when these men wrote ; and therefore it is no wonder that they *spoke as children*, that they *understood as children*, that they *thought as children*.'

Let it not be supposed that we have any interest in thus disparaging the authority of the early Fathers ; for so far as their testimony has any weight, and can be ascertained, it is clearly on our side in this controversy. The orthodox, forsooth, would have it as a universally conceded point among scholars, that the unanimous voice of the primitive church is in their favour ; and even many Unitarians, either from not

\* P. 156. Note. 3d. Ed.

possessing sufficient information, or feeling sufficient interest on the subject, seem half inclined tacitly to admit the claim; though one, as we shall presently see, without any foundation whatever, but in the arrogance and pertinacity with which it is urged. We are far from pretending that no passages can be adduced from the early Fathers irreconcilable with our principles; for we are far from believing that these men can always be reconciled with the scriptures, or with one another, or even with themselves. But we do maintain, and mean to prove, that the primitive church was clearly and decidedly *anti-calvinistic*.\*

It would lead us far beyond our limits to give the most succinct account of the opinions of the early Christians, and of the mutations and corruptions, which they underwent during the first four centuries. In the beginning all Christians seem to have been content, as Unitarians would be now, to speak of the divine influences in the work of salvation, and of the kindred topics, in the plain language of scripture, understanding it in its popular sense. Soon, however, the Philosophers and Mystics began to come into the church, bringing with them a multitude of distinctions, analogies, refinements, and 'oppositions of science falsely so called.' Then, too, appeared the Gnostic errors, and the Manichean principles respecting *fate*, overspreading the Christian world as a cloud, and darkening counsel by words without wisdom. Then arose that most vicious mode of interpreting scripture, the fruitful source of so many heresies, construing its language allegorically or philosophically, which was never intended to be understood but in a popular sense, and is, therefore, only true in a popular acceptance of subjects, having nothing to do either with mysticism or metaphysics. Then was kindled a

\*We purposely omit all mention of the early history of the *Trinity*, as our limits would not permit us to go sufficiently into the inquiry, and as the subject has been so ably and satisfactorily treated elsewhere. See particularly, *Le Platonisme dévoilé*; (par Souverain;) Priestley's *History of Early Opinions*; and the account of the controversy between Dr. Priestley and Dr. Horsley in the *General Repository*, Vols. II. and III. We agree entirely with the writer in the *Repository*, that if a man comes to the examination of this subject 'with a tolerable share of fairness of mind, he will leave it with the conviction, that few historical facts can be better established, than that the doctrine of the early Fathers, respecting the Trinity, was very different from the present orthodox doctrine, and that they maintained a decided and great inferiority of the Son to the Father.' Vol. III. p. 41.

zeal for the rites and sacraments of our religion, and the ministrations of the clergy ; out of which, as Semler justly observes,\* most of the controversies respecting *grace* and *original sin* arose. Baptism, they said, in order to magnify its importance, was necessary to salvation. But why necessary to *infants*, who had never committed actual transgression ? Why, because they were tainted with original sin ; for no other reason could be given. In this manner they reasoned, and, it is hardly necessary to add, that as they reasoned, their system grew. It is also true, that the final ascendancy of the 'doctrines of grace,' (as they have been strangely called,) was not a little owing to the amazing influence gained and exerted by a single man, Augustine. It is certainly a singular fact in history, that some of the worst errors of Mani and his followers, owed their establishment in the church to the exertions of an individual, a deserter from their communion, and a pretended confuter of their system. So, however, it was. This man, who had passed all his early life in a course of the most shameless and abandoned profligacy, and afterwards, his ambition taking another turn, had worked himself into a bishopric in Africa ; this African bishop, at a time when the East had openly declared for his rival Pelagius, and Rome was temporizing ; when, too, the voice of all antiquity was decidedly against him in many of his dogmas, and unanimously against him in some of them ; was yet able, by intrigue, by his talents, and his emissaries, to overcome all opposition, and to impose upon the Christian world a system of doctrines, that have retained to a considerable degree, though under a variety of modifications, their ascendancy and popularity to the present day.

This is all we can say, at present, of the early history of proper calvinism. Yet we are told by Dr. Beecher, (p. 26,) that 'the doctrines of original sin, entire depravity, regeneration by special grace, and justification by faith, continued to be received doctrines of the church until the time of Pelagius, about A. D. 400.' If any thing could surprise us in the way of assertion coming from this gentleman, the hazarding of such a statement would. As the shortest, and perhaps the most satisfactory, mode of exposing and refuting it, of show-

\* *Historias Eccles. Select. Capp. Tom. I. p. 221.*

ing that the whole argument from history, as adduced by Dr. Beecher, is based on error, and may be turned full against him, we shall just set before our readers a few examples of the manner in which the early Fathers expressed themselves respecting the doctrines above named, and also collect some testimonies to the same effect, from the best informed and most approved modern writers on this subject.

We begin with *Justin Martyr*, who flourished A. D. 140. 'But lest any one,' he observes, 'should imagine that I am asserting that things happen according to the necessity of fate, because I have said that things are foreknown, I proceed to refute that opinion also. That punishments, and chastisements, and good rewards are given *according to the worth of the actions of every one*, having learnt it from the prophets, we declare to be true; since if it were not so, but all things happen according to fate, nothing would be in our own power; for if it were *decreed* by fate, that one should be good and another bad, no praise would be due to the former, or blame to the latter. And, again, if mankind had not the power, by free will, to avoid what is disgraceful, and to choose what is good, they would not be responsible for their actions.' 'But we say that there is this immutable fate, namely, to those who choose what is good, a worthy reward; to those who choose the contrary, a worthy punishment.'\*

Our next citation shall be from *Tatian*, A. D. 172.

'The Word, before the formation of men, created angels. But each species of these created beings was endowed with *power over themselves*, not having natural goodness, except only from God, being perfected by men through the freedom of choice: that he who is wicked may be justly punished, being made wicked by himself; and that he who is just may deservedly be praised on account of his good actions, not having, *through his power over himself*, transgressed the will of God. Such is the nature of angels and men.'

\* Bishop Tomline's *Refutation of Calvinism*, seventh edition, pp. 291, 292. We accommodate ourselves in copying this, and some of the following quotations from the Fathers, from Bishop Tomline's large collection. The Bishop tells us in his preface, p. 6, in speaking of this collection; 'I desire it to be understood, that I have not selected what suits my own purpose, and suppressed what would have made against me. My inquiry has not furnished a *single passage* in any of the works of the ancient Fathers of the Christian Church, in which *any one* of the peculiar tenets of Calvin is maintained, with the exception of the later writings of Augustine, who did not live till the very end of the fourth century.'



*Irenæus*, A. D. 178, says : ' And God has preserved to man a will free, *and in his own power*, not only in works, but also *in faith*, saying, " According to your faith, be it unto you ;" (Matth. ix. 29.) shewing that the faith of man is his own, because he has his own will. And again, " All things are possible to him that believeth : " (Mark ix. 23.) And, " Go thy way, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee." (Matth. viii. 13.) And all such expressions shew that *man is in his own power with respect to faith.*'

We must pass over many very striking quotations from *Clement of Alexandria* and *Tertullian*, and come directly to *Origen*, who lived A. D. 230. We hardly know where to begin, or where to stop, in our citations from this writer, admitted by Jerome himself to have been ' the greatest doctor of the churches since the apostles.' The following, however, must suffice.

' Celsus, arguing according to his own principles, asserts, that it is very difficult to make a perfect change in nature : but we (knowing that there is one and the same nature in every rational soul, and maintaining, *that not a single one is formed wicked by the Creator of all things, but that many men become wicked by education, by example, and by influence*, so that wickedness is, as it were, naturalized in some) are persuaded that it is not only not impossible, but not very difficult, by the divine word to change wickedness naturalized, (*κακίαν φυσώσασαν*,) provided any one will but allow that he ought to commit himself to the Supreme God, and to do every thing with a reference to pleasing Him, with whom " the good and the bad are not held in the same estimation, and with whom the indolent and the active man do not meet with the same fate."'

The observing reader will notice that *Origen* here gives precisely the same account of sin, and of its origin in the individual, as is given by Dr. Ware, and other Unitarians. The same remark holds good also of another quotation from the same author.

' The virtue of a rational creature is mixed, arising from his own free-will, and the Divine Power conspiring with him who chooses that which is good. But there is need of our own free-will, and of divine cooperation, which does not depend upon our will, not only to become good and virtuous,

but also after we become so, that we may persevere in virtue ; since even a person who is made perfect will fall away, if he be elated by his virtue, and ascribe the whole to himself, not referring the due glory to Him who contributes by far the greater share, both in the acquisition of virtue, and in the perseverance in it.'

Origen was, likewise, a believer in different degrees of reward and punishment, in a future state. 'A diverse translation and a different glory undoubtedly will be given to every one, according to the merits of his actions ; and every one will be in that order, which the merits of his works have procured for him.\*'

We turn next to *Eusebius*, who wrote A. D. 315.

'The Creator of all things has impressed a natural law upon the soul of every man, as an assistant and ally in his conduct, pointing out to him the right way by this law ; but, by the free liberty with which he is endowed, making the choice of what is best worthy of praise and acceptance, and of greater rewards, on account of his good conduct, because he has acted rightly, not by force, but from his own free-will, when he had it in his power to act otherwise. As, again, making him who chooses what is worst, deserving of blame and punishment, as having by his own motion neglected the natural law, and becoming the origin and fountain of wickedness, and misusing himself, *not from any extraneous necessity*, but from free-will and judgment. The fault is in him who chooses, not in God. For God has not made nature or the substance of the soul bad ; for he who is good can make nothing but what is good. *Every thing is good which is according to nature*. Every rational soul has naturally a good free-will, formed for the choice of what is good. But when a man acts wrongly, nature is not to be blamed ; for what is wrong, takes place not according to nature, but contrary to nature, it being the work of choice, and not of nature.'

*Hilary of Poitiers*, A. D. 354, furnishes us with the following testimonies.

'He prays, therefore, God to give. *The beginning therefore is from ourselves*, when we pray that the gift may be

\* *Lardner's Credibility of Gospel History*. Works, 4to. Ed. Vol. I. p. 531.

from him : then, because it is his gift in consequence of our beginning, it is again our act that it is sought, and obtained, and that it continues.' 'Lest what is often wont to be said by many persons should have some authority of reason, who assert that it is the peculiar gift of God, that any one is conversant in the things and works of God, excusing their own infidelity, because they remain faithless from the want of God's good will towards them ; perseverance in faith is indeed the gift of God, *but the beginning is from ourselves.* And our will ought to have this property from itself, namely that it exerts itself. God will give increase to the beginning, because our weakness does not obtain consummation of itself ; yet the merit of obtaining consummation is from the beginning of the will.'

Out of a host of witnesses in the first four centuries against the calvinistic doctrine of 'special grace,' which Dr. Beecher has the folly to represent as a received doctrine during all that time, it will be sufficient for us to select a single passage from *Ambrose*, A. D. 374.

'The mystical Sun of Righteousness is risen upon ALL, is come for ALL, has suffered for ALL, and has risen again for ALL : he therefore suffered that he might take away the sin of the world. But if any one does not believe in Christ, he defrauds himself of the general benefit, just as if any one should exclude the rays of the sun by shutting his windows.'

We shall conclude our citations from the ancient Fathers by an account of a work, in five books, by *Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia*, written expressly 'against those who said, that men sin by nature, not by will and choice.' He considers it as a doctrine held by those in the west, and from thence brought into the east, especially by an author, called *Aram*, (now understood to have been *Jerome*, under a fictitious name,) who had written several books in defence of it. The opinions of that sect he represents in this manner. 'One of them is, that men sin by nature, not by choice. By nature, however, not meaning that, in which Adam was first formed ; for that, they say, was good ; but that which he afterwards had, when he had transgressed, being now bad instead of the good, and mortal instead of the immortal nature, which he

\* *Lardner's Credibility*. Works, Vol. II. p. 527.

before had. Hence men being bad by nature, who before were good, now sin by nature, not by choice. Another opinion of theirs, and consequent upon that, is, that infants, though newly born, are not free from sin; forasmuch as from Adam's transgression a sinful nature, as they express it, is derived to all his posterity; for this they allege those words, "I was born in sin," and others.\* Theodore lived about A. D. 400; was an intimate friend and fellow disciple of Chrysostom; a bishop thirty-six years, a voluminous writer, and wrote, as we are expressly told, 'against all heresies.' The particular 'heresy' referred to above was clearly neither more nor less than what is now called calvinism in its incipient stages. It is plain, likewise, that it had then but just begun to appear in the church in a distinct and systematic form, being treated as a novelty by one of the most learned men of the age; and also that when it did thus appear in a distinct and systematic form, it was immediately attacked, exposed, and condemned. Truly, therefore, Dr. Beecher may be said to be most unlucky in his statement; for the doctrines of original sin, entire depravity, and the accompanying errors, instead of being 'received doctrines of the church,' as he asserts, until the beginning of the fifth century, do not appear to have been broached, certainly not openly, systematically, and generally taught, until towards the close of the fourth. And, moreover, as soon as they were thus taught, they were met by a strong and decided opposition; an opposition which was not overcome by argument or persuasion; but by intrigue and caballing among bishops, by the growing ascendancy of the Church of Rome, and finally by decisions of councils,—that mighty engine of corruption, of which we can at this time form no adequate idea, which could in a single day, and by a casting vote, make the errors and superstitions of a few misguided, perhaps artful and designing, individuals, the errors and superstitions of the whole Catholic church, and which was never more powerful, active, or unprincipled, than at the period of which we are now speaking.\*

\* The Greeks called the Oecumenical Council, which assembled at Ephesus, A. D. 449, a 'GANG OF ROBBERS,' to signify that every thing was carried in it by fraud or violence. 'And many councils indeed,' says Mosheim, 'both in this and the following ages, are equally entitled to the same dishonourable appellation.' *Eccles. Hist.* Vol. II. p. 74.

The foregoing conclusions are still further sustained by the confession of Augustine, that he changed his opinions in some material points after his controversy with Pelagius had begun ; a change, indeed, evident enough without any such confession to those who consult his works. Confirmation is also to be derived from the fact, that Pelagius and his immediate followers, and still more the semi-pelagians afterwards, appealed with unanswerable confidence to the early Christians in attestation of their principles ; and also from the circumstance that many of the preceding Fathers, whose authority up to that time had ever been held in the highest veneration in the church, (such as Origen and Theodore,) soon began to fall under the suspicion and censure of those who joined themselves to Augustine's party. Besides, we are to consider in this connexion what has been so satisfactorily proved by Grotius,\* that modern Pelagians, or Arminians, do not push their opposition to the famous Five Points to such extremes as Pelagius himself is represented as having done, and therefore may and do agree with the primitive church, even in those respects in which he is represented as having differed from it.

We may be thought, perhaps, to have spent more time upon this argument, than it is worth ; but as it is one which ought to have some influence when properly applied, and has had much when misapplied, it is certainly important that the subject should be understood. If our work had been intended for scholars only, we might have contented ourselves with simply asserting the fact of the anti-calvinism of the primitive church, without running any hazard of contradiction. Nay, so unanimous are all the best writers upon this subject, that we might challenge Dr. Beecher to produce a single respectable authority to bear him out in his assertions, if he means by the doctrines he has named, those doctrines, as they are held and explained by Calvinists. All the best writers of his own party are against him. Calvin himself says, ' Perhaps I may be thought to have raised a great prejudice against myself, by confessing that ALL the ecclesiastical writers, *except Augustine*, have treated this subject with such ambiguities or variations, that nothing certain can be learned from their writ-

\* In his *Disquisitio an Pelagiana sint ea dogmata quae nunc sub eo nomine traduntur*. Opp. Theolog. Tom. IV. p. 361, et seq.

ings.\* Similar confessions are found in Beza and Vossius, but our limits will not admit of their insertion. Jansenius, also, the founder of a sect among the Catholics, bearing his name, and holding calvinistic sentiments, does not hesitate to say in so many words : ' That Augustine was the first among the Holy Fathers, who taught Christians the meaning of the New Testament.'† Even Milner, though he wrote for the special purpose of proving, at all events, that the true church was always calvinistic, is obliged, however, to confess that long before Augustine appeared, the calvinistic doctrine of *justification* ' had been pitiously suffocated, as it were, in the rubbish of the growing superstition, and had been gradually sinking in the church from Justin's days. And I more admire,' he continues, ' that he was enabled to RECOVER its constituent parts so well as he did, than that HE did not arrange and adjust them perfectly.' \* \* \* ' The peculiar work for which Augustine was evidently raised up by Providence was, to RESTORE the doctrine of *divine grace* to the church.'‡

The learned Simon is also, from the attention which he bestowed upon the subject, an important witness in this investigation ; and his testimony goes to establish the position which we have taken. ' We should guard,' says he, ' against the doctrine that has prevailed among the Latins since the days of Augustine, that nothing can be said for Pelagius in all those places where he differs from that Father ; for otherwise we shall be under the necessity of charging most of the ancient doctors of the church with heresy.' He does, indeed, contend that Pelagius carried some of his principles too far ; but this is no more than what is admitted by Grotius, and other Arminians and Unitarians. ' All antiquity,' says he, in another place, ' which had opposed itself strongly to the Gnostics and Manicheans, who destroyed the liberty of man, seemed to speak in favour of Pelagius and his followers. If they had not run into the opposite extreme, absolutely denying the necessity of internal grace, they might have boasted of having tradition on their side.'§

\* *Institutes*. (Allen's) Vol. II. p. 280.

† *Histoire Critique Nov. Test.* par R. Simon. Tom. I. p. 291.

‡ *Church History*. 1st. Am. Ed. Vol. II. pp. 442, 443.

§ *Histoire Critique Nov. Test.* Tom. I. pp. 238, 290.

Few have written on the early opinions of the church whose authority is entitled to more respect than Beausobre; and his testimony upon this point is also decisive. 'I allow,' says he, 'that those ancient writers, in general, say the Manicheans denied free-will. The reason is, that the Fathers believed, and maintained, against the Manicheans, that whatever state man is in he has the command over his own actions, and has equally power to do good or evil. Augustine himself reasoned upon this principle, as well as other Catholics his predecessors, so long as he had to do with the Manicheans. But when he came to dispute with the Pelagians he changed his system. Then he denied that kind of freedom which before he had defended; and, so far as I am able to judge, his sentiments no longer differed from theirs concerning the servitude of the will. He ascribed that servitude to the corruption which original sin brought into our nature; whereas the Manicheans ascribed it to an evil quality, eternally inherent in matter.'\*

A volume would not contain the passages to the same effect, which we might extract from Priestley, Munscher, and other more recent authorities. But if any are not convinced already, nothing will convince them. We shall, therefore, dismiss this topic with a single quotation from Dr. Lardner; whose thorough acquaintance with this subject no one will question, and whose candour and fairness all parties unite to extol. 'Flacius, or some other learned writer of his time, in the preface to the *Centuriæ Magdeburgenses*, observes of Eusebius bishop of Cæsarea [A. D. 315]: "That it is a very low and imperfect description, which he gives of a Christian; making him only a man, who by the knowledge of Christ and his doctrine, is brought to the worship of the one true God, and the practice of sobriety, righteousness, patience, and other virtues. But he has not a word about regeneration, or imputed righteousness."—Poor, ignorant, primitive Christians! I wonder how they could find the way to heaven! They lived near the times of Christ and his apostles. They highly valued and diligently read the holy scriptures, and some wrote commentaries upon them; but yet, it seems, they knew little or nothing of their religion; though they embraced and pro-

\* *Histoire de Maniché.* Tom. II. p. 448. See also pp. 38, 98, 466.

fessed it with the manifest hazard of all earthly good things, and many of them laid down their lives rather than renounce it. Truly we of these times are very happy in our orthodoxy ; but I wish we did more excel in those virtues which they, and the scriptures likewise, I think, recommend, as the distinguishing properties of a Christian. And I am not a little apprehensive, that many things, which now make a fair show among us, and in which we mightily pride ourselves, will in the end prove weeds only, on which the owner of the ground sets no value.\*

It remains for us to compare the two rival systems with respect to their MORAL EFFICACY AND SANCTIFYING INFLUENCE. 'The question is not,' as Mr. Sparks has well observed, 'which party is perfect, but which is most defective in consequence of its faith, and whether any one is to be pointed at, and denounced, and condemned by all the rest.' Unitarians have always felt and expressed a reluctance to enter upon this discussion, because it is one more likely than any other to lead to uncandid and unchristian remarks on both sides, and less likely than any other to advance the interests of goodness and truth on either ; because they have learned from experience, that its only probable effect upon the adverse party is to exasperate their feelings and rivet their prejudices, or at best to inflict on them a deep sense of intentional injury, while its only influence on the party whom it favours, is to confirm them still more in the vicious habit of trusting in themselves that they are righteous, and despising others. When, however, they have been dared to it, and provoked to it by their adversaries, and it has become necessary in justice to their own characters, and in justice to that cause which they believe to be the cause of truth and the cause of God, to enter into this comparison, they never have yet, and they never will shrink from the trial.

In pursuing this inquiry, Dr. Beecher has shown a disregard for many obvious distinctions, which can do him no honour ; for to say that he did not perceive them, is paying no compliment to his understanding, and to say that he perceived them, but would not acknowledge them, is paying no compliment to his conscience. In comparing the two sects to-

\* *Credibility of Gospel History.* Works, Vol. II. p. 278



gether he seems every where to go upon the strange assumption, that all those who are not orthodox christians are to be considered as liberal Christians ; whereas he must know, that a large proportion of mankind, even in Christian countries, are not properly speaking Christians of *any* name, or, at best, are Christians only *in name*. There is reason to fear, that the bulk of every denomination are nominal Christians only ; and, of course, the system which they pretend to adopt, but do not really adopt, is not responsible for their moral deficiencies. We do not know that more nominal Christians incline to the liberal system than to the orthodox. But even if this could be proved, as Dr. Beecher contends, if it could be proved, that by far the largest proportion of nominal Christians, who are men of reading, and information, and knowledge of the world, do favour liberal principles, it would certainly be a strange objection to bring against the system, that even those who will not obey it, are yet constrained to acknowledge its truth, excellence, and superiority. And, on the other hand, it would be a most curious argument in favour of orthodoxy, to say that all these men are able to detect, at a single glance, its want of evidence, and see through the pretences of its advocates. When Dr. Beecher speaks (p. 20.) of liberal *Christians* renouncing their vicious and profligate habits upon embracing orthodoxy, there is an absurdity in the proposition which refutes itself. That some *nominal* Christians go over to the orthodox party, and reform their lives upon it, is probably true. But the same is also true of nominal Christians, who come over to the liberal system, and embrace it *sincerely*, as can be testified by a thousand examples.

After laying down the very questionable 'maxim, that the same cause, in the same circumstances, will produce the same effect,' 'in the moral as in the natural world,' Dr. Beecher goes on to state : (p. 9.) 'The Gospel, the greatest moral cause which has ever operated in the world, is the same now as in the apostolic age ; and the *heart* of man, *civilized* or *uncivilized*, is also the *same*. So that this great cause is operating now, *precisely in the same circumstances* as it did in the primitive age.' That is to say ; the preaching of the same doctrines must always be followed by precisely the same effects upon the hearers, whether in the primitive church, in the dark ages, or now ; whether in a congregation

of Europeans, or Owyhees, or Hottentots; for to all this extent his argument must go to answer his purpose. Now that the 'Gospel' is the same in all ages and places, 'the same yesterday, to-day, and forever,' will not, of course, be denied; nor need it be, that the 'heart of man' is for the most part nearly the same, if you understand by it nothing more than the moral faculty or faculties which man possesses, as man. But if you understand by the 'heart of man,' as it must be understood, to sustain Dr. Beecher's reasonings, the *actual state* of the affections, dispositions, and whole mind, nothing can be more unlike than the heart of a civilized man and the heart of a savage, the heart of an educated man and of a man wholly uninformed, the heart of a servile and bigotted Jew in the time of the apostles, and the heart of an intelligent, independent, and highminded American of the present day. Consequently it is not true, as is asserted in this discourse, that 'this great cause,' the Gospel, 'is operating now under precisely the same circumstances as it did in the primitive age.' The circumstances are materially changed, and, therefore, we cannot argue, as Dr. Beecher undertakes to do, from any supposed identity in the effects produced, to the actual identity of the cause producing them, now as then. Let the very same Gospel be preached; let the same truths, the same reasons, the same motives be presented; still, as we shall consider them in different states of mind, and under different lights, and in different connexions, it follows of necessity, that they must make a different impression on us, and meet with a different reception; encounter other prejudices, raise other difficulties, and start other objections, at the same time that they are aided by other facilities, and recommended by other considerations and inducements.

If, therefore, Dr. Beecher had succeeded in showing that the orthodox system is met now by similar objections to those, which were urged against the preaching of the apostles, it does not follow, that the apostles preached the doctrines of modern orthodoxy; because it has been under different circumstances, that these objections have been alleged. The objections urged against the first preaching of the apostles may all be traced to some misapprehension of their meaning, or some prejudice of the age or people; but now that their language is understood, and these prejudices have passed

away, to say that the orthodox system still continues liable to the same objections, does not prove it to be the same system with that which the apostles taught, but a different one. So likewise if it were true, as Dr. Beecher asserts, that modern orthodoxy resembles the first preaching of the apostles, in being patronized chiefly by the poor and uneducated, it would prove nothing to his purpose; because the circumstances are changed. In the apostolic age it was a matter of interest, and policy, and ambition with men of education and standing, to oppose an unpopular religion that was just struggling into existence, threatening destruction, if it prevailed, to the prejudices on which they depended for their influence and security. But none of these causes can operate now to alienate men of information from the orthodox system, and limit its acceptance and belief to the 'common people.' On the contrary, it is perfectly well understood, that there is not a community on the face of the earth, where worldly policy, alone considered, would not dictate an avowed dissent from Unitarianism. Besides, is it not something new under the sun to think of *proving* a system by the number and weight of *objections*, to which it is liable? or by admitting the fact, that it will be more likely to be embraced by men, the more ignorant they are upon other subjects, and therefore the more liable to be deceived on this?

Dr. Beecher does not forget to drag in the hackneyed objection to Unitarianism, that its believers seldom possess that 'unwavering confidence' in their conclusions, which, it seems, belongs to orthodoxy; that they never know where to stop in their inquiries; and we are told, for the thousandth time, of the successive gradations through which Dr. Priestley fell in settling down to the faith in which he died. We would simply ask the gentlemen, who are so fond of this argument, how they would *expect*, from what they know of the human mind, that a man, who had been educated in the belief of many errors, should succeed in shaking these errors off?—at once, or successively? We would appeal to the history of the reformation, and ask how it was with Luther and his partisans? Did they renounce the errors of the Romish church at once, or successively? Nay, we would appeal to Dr. Beecher's own experience. Let him remember that he holds the very lowest form of that '*new divinity*,' which the

Calvinists at the south have publicly pronounced to be 'at war with the philosophy of the human mind, with common sense, and with the word of the living God,' and 'in some very material points' ANOTHER GOSPEL 'indeed.\*' Was it at once, or has it been gradually, that he has departed so far from what Dr. Mason calls 'the good old doctrines of the reformation?' Besides, this whole argument, as employed against the Unitarians, must go upon the assumption that the tendencies of fair and free inquiry are fatal to the cause of revelation; and involves a principle, the honour of advocating which, Dr. Beecher must share equally with the CATHOLICK Bossuet against all protestants,† and with the INFIDEL Gibbon against all Christians.‡

Indeed, this charge has been so often alleged and repeated, exposed and refuted, that it is a weariness to mention it. It is probably true, (not of Unitarians alone, but generally,) that in the process of extirpating long established and deeprooted errors and prejudices, the mind is exposed to peculiar temptations and inconveniences. But this evil is to be charged, not upon the process itself, but upon the errors and prejudices which have made the process necessary. Calvinists, who were educated such, should be compared with Unitarians, who have been educated such, and then it will be seen, that none are less liable than the latter to the charge of inconstancy. Nay, strange as it may seem, the complaint of fickleness and inconstancy, sometimes made against Unitarians, has arisen, not from any changes among *Unitarians* to become Calvinists, but from the frequent changes among *Calvinists*, (as in the case of Dr. Priestley,) to become Unitarians. Unitarians also are accustomed to make a distinction between a *firm* faith resting on evidence, and an *obstinate* faith held without any regard to evidence. They are not at all surprised that a man who believes in an absurd proposition, should believe in it *desperately*. They are perfectly aware how little ground there can be to hope that men may be reasoned *out of* their errors, when in fact they were never *reasoned into* them, but adopted them from prejudice, passion, or policy. Finally, if it be a reproach to

\* Ely's *Contrast between Calvinism and Hopkinsianism*. Recommendations.

† *Histoire des Variations*, liv. 14.

‡ *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ch. LIV.

any system, that it encourages free inquiry, and requires us to keep our minds always open to conviction, and to follow the light of revelation wherever it may lead us, it is probably a reproach, which Unitarianism must forever continue to bear, in common with every other system truly *Protestant*.

Moreover, in speaking of the effect of the orthodox system in producing Christian obedience, and forming a Christian character, Dr. Beecher seems to forget that there may be differences of opinion, among men equally competent to judge as himself, as to what constitutes a truly Christian character. In his conception of this character he may leave out some parts, which another shall think essential, or add some parts, which, in the opinion of another, must seriously mar the harmony and effect of the whole. Supposing, therefore, that Dr. Beecher could show, that his views of religion were better adapted than mine are to form the Christian character, as *he* understands it; still this proves nothing, for after all my views of religion may be better adapted than his are to form the Christian character as *I* understand it, and as it ought to be understood. All agree, it is true, in making *piety* to be the foundation of evangelical holiness; but in how many, and in what different ways, may this piety be exhibited? Some prefer it as it appears in the quiet and unostentatious performance of the moral duties, and in the calmness and retirement of religious contemplation; and others prefer it as it appears in the multiplication of the *formal* services of religion, and in the more noisy operations of what is called *zeal*. Again; all agree that *charity* is indispensable in a Christian; but what extremely meagre views many Christians have of the bearings and extent of this heavenly virtue, this 'new commandment!' The power of the orthodox system to produce *some parts* of the Christian character in a high degree of perfection, need not be disputed. But the whole character of a man is made up of a much more complex assemblage of passions and habits, and the process of affecting all these favourably, without doing injury to any of them, is a much more difficult one, than is dreamed of in Dr. Beecher's philosophy.

These remarks are applicable to what is said in this discourse respecting 'Revivals of Religion,' as they are termed. It is not for want of any power in Unitarian principles, that

they so seldom occur among Unitarians, or at least are so seldom obtruded on our notice. It requires but very little power in the principles themselves, provided they are dexterously wrought upon, to occasion one of these excitements. We have known an election, or a law-suit, to excite a town as strongly, as generally, as really, and we had almost said as permanently. The true reason why these temporary excitements do not more frequently occur among Unitarians, is, that they differ in opinion from the orthodox as to their value and importance. Unitarians may be mistaken in their judgment on this point; and, indeed, we have reason to suspect that some of them have carried their opposition to revivals to an extreme, and have used improper and indecorous language in speaking of them. This, however, is not to be referred to any want of power in their principles, in their system, but to their notions of propriety and expediency. Nay, it is admitted on high Calvinistic, or, (if Dr. Beecher will have it so) Evangelical authority, that the cold and benumbing speculations of Calvinism are found to be extremely injurious and prejudicial in these awakenings. In an account of one of them given in the *Missionary Herald*,\* we are told, that in the early stages of the excitement a dependence on Calvinistic doctrines produced an *Antinomian spirit*, the tendency of which manifestly was 'to paralyze, wonderfully, the feelings of the soul.' 'In the early stages of the revival, the doctrine of entire dependence on divine agency, was in the presence of the unconverted, less urged than some other doctrines. It was seen to be *abused*. The *medicine*, if I may so call it, *did not appear to operate favourably*.' The doctrine of *election* was also *abused*, and had a mischievous effect upon the subjects of the excitement, and it was found better to treat them '*as reasonable beings*.' We think the remarks of this very sensible writer are of universal application. Calvinistic preachers, would do better to treat their hearers *always* '*as reasonable beings*;' for we are confident that any other '*medicine*' will be found '*to operate unfavourably*.' If these excitements are to be defended and aided, let it be on those great principles, which we all hold in common; those fearful relations and dependences, which connect man with

\* No. for March, 1823.

God, and time with eternity.—It should be observed in this connexion, that the most remarkable revival of religion that has ever occurred, **METHODISM**, commenced in a denial of the leading peculiarities of Calvinism, and in the maintenance of the most obnoxious and least tenable dogma of Pelagius, human perfectibility.

If our limits would permit, we might take a similar view of what Dr. Beecher says of the Missionary Enterprize. It is not from any difference in their religious principles that Unitarians have been less forward and unanimous in this undertaking; but because they differ from the orthodox as to the practicability, and general expediency, of any course of measures, which has *yet* been proposed. Propose to them any plan for extending the privileges and advantages of the Gospel to the heathens, and convince them that it is one which reason and God approve, and all real Unitarian Christians will have motives for engaging in it as near to infinite, as finite beings are capable of feeling or comprehending.

In thus speaking of the moral efficacy of the two rival systems it is a pleasure to us, now and always, to acknowledge the good qualities which recommend our opponents; their unquestionable sincerity as a body, their laudable zeal in promoting many of the benevolent undertakings that distinguish this age, their endeavours to excite a spirit of greater seriousness and consideration among the people, and to stem the torrent of vice that is forever setting in upon a thoughtless world.\* We wish that Dr. Beecher could also have found something in his opponents, as a body, on which to have spoken in terms of complacency. Alas, poor human nature! What a pity it is that our adversaries *will* have good qualities, and that we are sometimes called upon to acknowledge them. It is a cross almost too heavy for Dr. Beecher to bear. We doubt whether, in all that he has written or said, he has ever yielded

\* 'If by immorality you understand the breach of those civil and political laws, which are indispensable to the existence of society, and which are included in the famous decalogue of Moses; if you allude to impiety, dishonesty, debauchery, fraud, and falsehood, the Evangelical preachers and their people generally, must be acquitted both of the crimes themselves, and of any *intention* to countenance them. But so far as your accusation refers to the perversion of the religious principle from its proper object, the distortion of it into a fantastic shape, and inspiring it with a mischievous spirit, fatal to the peace, the happiness, and further moral improvement of its believers, you are supported by undeniable facts.' *Burn's Inquiry*. P. I. p. 48.

to Unitarians, as a body, so much as the *name* of Christian. A few among them, it appears, there are, who 'on many accounts deserve our respect and commendation;' but as *Christians* they deserve nothing. We can find no seriousness, no strictness, no spirituality, no martyrdom among them.—No martyrdom among the Unitarians! Not to speak of the first Christians, has Dr. Beecher forgotten the sufferings of the Arians? Has he forgotten the murder of Servetus, and of Joan Bocher, and the Anabaptists, many of whom fell much more for their dissent from Calvinism, than for any political heresies? Has he forgotten the excesses and outrages, that were committed upon the Remonstrants in the Low Countries? Has he forgotten the best blood of Poland, poured out like water upon the altar of the ONE GOD? Where, indeed, but in this country, have Unitarians been able to escape martyrdom? and let him produce, if he can, from the whole history of the world, the example of a people suffering with greater constancy and dignity.

Dr. Beecher speaks of the effects, which the two systems have produced in countries where they have respectively prevailed. Unfortunately Unitarianism has never yet *prevailed* in any country, and, therefore, this comparison cannot be made. One thing, however, may be observed respecting it, that in almost every instance in which an uncommon looseness of principle, and profligacy of manners, have come in upon a nation, (as in the reign of Charles II. in England,) it has plainly been owing to the reaction occasioned in the public mind by the previous ascendancy of high Calvinism. It is also not a little difficult to reconcile with Dr. Beecher's conclusions, that in our own country, where alone Unitarianism has had a chance of prevailing, it has prevailed most in that section of it most remarkable for the principles, habits, and institutions, which distinguish a moral and religious community.

The authority of Dr. Priestley is quoted against us in this discourse; but what was our surprise, on recurring to the work from which the quotation is taken, to find that Dr. Beecher had been guilty of an artifice and an unfairness in citing it, which we do not recollect to have seen equalled by any writer in this controversy, with the exception, perhaps, of Bishop Magee. He has given the passage as one continued quotation, though in the work cited it is divided by a



whole paragraph ; the two parts referring to different subjects and different persons, though Dr. Beecher has contrived to connect them so together, that they appear to refer to one. So diverse, indeed, were the *real* opinions of Dr. Priestley upon this subject, from what they are represented as being by our author, that he expressly says, immediately following the course of remarks from which the quotation is taken, 'In fact, there is no greater reason to complain of the *lukewarmness* of the generality of Unitarians, than there is of the generality of Christians of all denominations.'\*

There are many other passages in this sermon which would justify the severest animadversions ; for it has seldom been our lot to meet with a work coming from a respectable quarter so abundant in false assertions and tortuous reasonings. But we remember how invidious and profitless are all such criticisms, and refrain. 'One danger *only* is to be guarded against,' according to Dr. Beecher, in our religious discussions. 'If our personal attachments, and literary friendships, and courtesy of manner, should bring down the high and holy subject of contending for the faith to a cool and amicable trial of classical and polemical skill, the public feeling would soon be chilled, and fall to this low level of practical estimation.' (p. 42.) We can assure Dr. Beecher that the possession of a *cool* and *amicable temper*, and the observance of a *candid* and *courteous manner*, are by no means the *only* nor the *greatest* temptations, to which theological disputants are exposed. And we sincerely hope that he may himself be convinced of this, before he shall give his next publication to the world ; for it may help him to give one which shall do him much more credit as a scholar, a Christian, and a man.

\* *Discourses on Various Subjects.* Eng. Ed. p. 96.





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